

I have always felt strongly about the plight of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, especially given the comfortable nature of my own life and the fact that my grandparents were able to migrate to England many years ago from Poland, Ukraine and Ireland. Like many other people, I have been feeling so helpless and in despair about the present political climate of hostility towards refugees. I have been wondering what I could do to make a difference.

So when a friend of mine asked me last year if I would give a fund-raising recital to support their local refugee families in Charlbury, Oxfordshire, I immediately agreed. The event was a sell-out, everyone seemed to have a good time and they raised a lot of money.

I realised that, quite by chance, the composers I had picked for that programme – Haydn; Chopin and Rachmaninov – had all been migrants in different ways. Perhaps this coincidence wasn't really so surprising after all. The history of music is full of composers who left their homeland because of war, political upheaval or fear of persecution, or who simply migrated at some point during their careers for their work or other reasons: Scarlatti, Handel, Haydn, Clementi, Field, Chopin, Smetana, Dvořák, Albeniz, Rachmaninov, Medtner, Prokofiev, Delius... the list is endless, and that's before you even start on all the composers, Jewish or otherwise, who fled the spectre of Nazism: Schoenberg, Dohnányi, Bartók, Stravinsky, Martinů, Bloch, Hindemith, Weill, Korngold... the musical landscape (and Hollywood!) would look very different if composers had not been able to move country.

This fact, and the success of the Charlbury concert, inspired me to devise a full-length recital. The idea behind it is that I will introduce and play pieces by composers who were either 'migrants' themselves (how I hate the connotations of that word!), or other composers who wrote on the theme of exile and homesickness.

Flights and farewells

I have called the recital 'Far from the home I love'. Like *Fiddler On The Roof* (where the title comes from), this programme isn't full of sad music. I have also chosen uplifting, happy, even humorous pieces, as well as dramatic, heroic and virtuoso works.

The programme opens with Handel – in fact I went to school in the very building where he lived and worked as a house composer for the first Duke of Chandos. Then there's a sonata by

Haydn, who felt so isolated during all the years he spent at the remote Esterházy estate in Hungary, acutely missing his beloved Vienna.

I'm playing two *Etudes-tableaux*, the last pieces Rachmaninov wrote before fleeing by sled over the border into Finland, and two movements from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* which fit perfectly with the theme, because Romeo had to go into exile after Juliet's death. Prokofiev is an interesting case as he was someone who went 'the other way': after many years in France and the US he returned to his home in Soviet Russia. He explained this strange decision in a letter, but we may never fully understand everything that was behind it.

I also wanted a representative of the mass displacement of peoples after the Anschluss and the Holocaust.

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Three short piano pieces by Hans Gál fit the bill perfectly. They are utterly delightful, and surprisingly humorous given the horrors engulfing Europe at the time. Gál fled Vienna to settle in Edinburgh where he taught for many years at the University and he was one of the founders of the Edinburgh Festival.

Then there's that great humanitarian, Edvard Grieg. He never migrated himself, but he travelled widely on tour with his wife Nina, and I'm including a trio of Lyric Pieces which vividly depict the different moods of wandering: *Solitary Traveller*, *Homesickness* and *Homewards*. It was also an obvious decision for me to include a poignant piece by Francis Pott called *Farewell to Hirta*. Francis is not Scottish himself, but he composed a beautiful evocation of the last inhabitants of St Kilda making their final journey away from their homeland that they had been given no choice but to abandon. When I performed it a couple of years ago in Japan, I dedicated it to all those displaced in the aftermath of the Fukushima earthquake and tsunami. I was incredibly moved to witness their response to the piece.

I am particularly excited to be playing a short piece I commissioned for the programme from a current refugee. Moutaz Arian is the Kurdish

Syrian who wrote the stirring Refugee Nation Anthem for the 2016 Rio Olympics. He now lives in Beijing (long story!) and he has come up with a haunting little piece called *Memories from my Land*.

No recital on the theme of refuge and asylum would be complete without something by that archetypal composer-in-exile, Chopin, whose music sings of the very essence of longing for homeland. 'Far from the home I love' comes to a triumphant close with his 'Heroic' Polonaise.

With the programme fleshed out, the next step was to offer it as a fundraising tool for any groups or organisations supporting refugees in the UK, with my services being offered for free. Another friend of mine put me in touch with a wonderful organisation called City of Sanctuary. This is an umbrella network which

supports a hundred groups based in villages, towns, cities and regions across the UK, all working towards promoting a vision of welcome and hospitality to people fleeing violence and persecution. My target is to raise £88,000, which I'm sure readers will instantly realise represents £1,000 for each of the 88 keys on a piano! *Pianist* readers are, of course, very welcome to make a donation even if they can't attend any of the concerts. ■

Far from the Home I Love runs 1 February to 3 November at venues across the UK. Full details at margaretfingerhut.co.uk and cityofsanctuary.org/farfromhome. Readers can make a donation to City of Sanctuary by going to www.givey.com/margaretfingerhut



Margaret Fingerhut's most recent release, *Endless Song*, contains a collection of 20 encore-style pieces by Liszt, Mendelssohn, Rachmaninov, Poulenc, Gershwin and more. The album was Editor's Choice inside a past issue of *Pianist*.

FIRST PERSON



Far from
the home
I love

As the granddaughter of immigrants, **Margaret Fingerhut** is deeply concerned by the plight of today's refugees. She has planned a recital of words and music to raise awareness and gain support